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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes demographic information about rural populations in the United States and discusses a variety of issues that are relevant to rural youth poverty. Although recent poverty rates for rural areas were higher than urban poverty rates, the media and political forces have almost completely neglected the rural poor. Extensive census reports and statistical data are abstracted in an attempt to characterize rural areas demographically, to differentiate and define these areas, and to draw attention to the poverty of rural youth compared with youth poverty in metropolitan centers. The following areas are considered: (1) population trends; (2) jobs, wages, and unemployment; (3) wealth and poverty distribution; (4) geographic and ethnic distributions; (5) rural youth, the rural "hyper-poor," and migrant children; (6) health issues; and (7) educational issues. The report contrasts rural and metropolitan school size, teacher and administrator responsibilities and benefits, and student performance. A final section discusses the importance of public policy changes focused on comprehensive services and new economic opportunities that may allow rural areas to maintain their current residents and rural children to achieve their potential. Contains 30 references. (RAH)

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THE INVISIBLE POOR: RURAL YOUTH IN AMERICA

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By Harold Hodgkinson
with the assistance of
Anita Massey Obarakpor

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THE INVISIBLE POOR: RURAL YOUTH IN AMERICA

By
Harold Hodgkinson

with the assistance of
Anita Massey Obarakpor

Institute for Educational Leadership
Center for Demographic Policy

January 1994

Preface

More than most of our reports, this report on rural youth in America represents a major compression of a large amount of information into a (hopefully) short and readable report. In preparing the report, it is clear that most Americans have not been informed that as a youth policy issue, persistent rural poverty is a major American problem. However, the issue has received virtually no national visibility, particularly when compared with the visibility of urban youth poverty (gangs, drugs, and violence).

While there are meaningful strategies to deal with urban youth poverty, even a debate over alternatives for dealing with rural youth poverty is lacking. Low-density areas have inherent problems in terms of the cost of delivering services per client. In a city, you can deliver 100 meals on wheels in an hour to a housing project; in a rural area you'll be lucky to deliver 10, if there are people living five miles apart. We have attempted to explore the range of issues that surround rural youth poverty, in order to increase understanding of the importance of developing a coherent strategy to improve the quality of life and future potential of young people living in rural areas.

I am grateful to the Exxon and U.S. West Foundations for their support of this project. My colleagues in the Center for Demographic Policy, Janice Hamilton Outtz, Co-Director of IEL's Center for Demographic Policy and Anita M. Obarakpor, Research Associate, have done their usual excellent job in literature search and classification, publication preparation and editing. In addition, Mike Usdan and Louise Clarke have been very helpful in editorial assistance and general support. However, errors of fact or interpretation remain the responsibility of the author. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Exxon Education Foundation or the U.S. West Foundation.

Harold L. Hodgkinson
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THE INVISIBLE POOR: Rural Youth In America

Introduction

One of the major social policy assumptions of the late 1970s and 1980s was that an American "underclass" (i.e., people who were not only poor, but dependent on welfare programs throughout their lives, surrounded by drugs, violence and gangs, who raised children in non-traditional family settings - not necessarily by the biological mother and father, and who held no hope that their children could rise above the circumstances of their birth) was forming in America's inner cities. As a result, federal social programs for youth often reflected an "inner city" view of life in their guidelines and eligibility criteria.

During this time period, a second "underclass" was developing in **rural** America. This "underclass" was almost completely neglected by the media and political forces. Poverty rates in rural America were the **same** as those in central cities in 1988, according to a 1988 report by William O'Hare of the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, D.C. However, by 1991, poverty rates for rural areas were higher. As federal programs such as Head Start, Women, Infant and Children (WIC) and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) are continually debated in Congress, little attention has been focused on the issues and possible solutions to rural youth poverty. When we think of youth poverty, we still usually imagine ghetto conditions in crowded inner cities. The reality is that a higher percentage of rural children are poorer than non-rural children, and the rates in rural areas are the same as in most inner cities, according to researcher Arloc Sherman.

It is easy to show urban youth poverty in American. For example, the television sound truck can drive to a city housing project and get pictures of poor inner city youth back to the station in time for the next edition of action news. But in rural Mississippi, Arkansas, New Mexico, North Carolina or Montana, poverty does not jump out at you, you must seek it out. There are no crowds of rural poor youth. The television sound truck would have to be parked off the road and the camera crew may have to walk a half mile to find **one** impoverished household. Low density populations are harder to locate and categorize, and much harder to organize politically. The television sound truck

would not make the next action news segment in a rural area.

The point of this paper is to summarize what is known about rural populations in the U.S. and to discuss a variety of issues (e.g., family structure, job availability, education and health care) that are relevant to rural youth poverty. It is hoped that this information will underscore the fact that rural poverty is not urban poverty in a different setting.

Rural, Nonmetro and Farm are Not the Same!

Anyone who rushes to the *U.S. Statistical Abstract*, a compendium of more than 1,900 tables on the U.S. population, to find out about rural populations will be disappointed. Many tables with data below the national level in the 1993 edition are for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas only. By definition, a metro area must contain at least one city with 50,000 or more inhabitants, and a total population of 100,000. The counties comprising a metro area are determined to be metro counties, using the same criteria, by the Office of Management and Budget, the federal agency responsible for the definition. Central cities, also referred to as "inner cities," are the largest cities in each metro area.

Over 90 percent of the rural population has nothing to do with agriculture.

While metro definitions are quite precise, the definition of nonmetro areas is a true residual category. It is everything that is not metro. Rural is usually defined as "that which is not urban." Only six tables in the 1992 *Statistical Abstract* use the term at all. "Farm" is not used as an area descriptor in the 1992 *Abstract*. One can find the value of crops grown but not much about the people who reside in farm households.

This matter of definition is of great importance to our task. Catch-all definitions like rural and nonmetro neatly gloss over differences within these areas. Even if rural is defined as being low density, vital differences are still missed. The Mississippi Delta has low population density, as does a seaside or skiing resort, or an area in southern New Hampshire which is mostly magazine editorial offices, computer mail-order houses and software development firms. Saying that they all have small numbers of people per square mile is not saying anything very useful. As William Alonso, member of the Task Force on Persistent Poverty, puts it,"an astronomical observatory on top of an isolated mountain is really an example of urban people in low density settings, hardly rural in any useful sense."

Thus our general stereotypes about rural areas and peoples usually proceed untested by data. "Rural area" to most of us means farms and farming, even though over 90 percent of the rural population has nothing to do with

agriculture. Throughout this report we have adopted (by necessity) the U.S. Bureau of the Census definitions of metropolitan, nonmetropolitan and rural areas. The term "rural" as used in this report is used to mean nonmetropolitan -- areas of the U.S. outside metropolitan areas. Let us now look at what we do know about these population trends.

Rural Population Trends: From Renaissance to Hemorrhage

During much of the 1970s, rural areas were usually gaining population through net migration. Farming was doing fairly well, manufacturing was up, retirees were looking for peace and quiet, energy companies were hiring and children in these rural areas were staying put. Indeed, between 1970 and 1980, fully 81 percent of the nonmetro counties grew in population. However, the bomb was dropped during the 1980 to 1990 period, as only 47 percent of the counties grew, according to Glenn Fuguitt at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Actually, the growth rates from 1950 on were below 50 percent for these counties, so the real aberration was the 1970s expansion, not the 1980s decline. Reasons for 1980s population decline in rural/nonmetro areas would include a sharp drop in farm profitability, the end of the "energy boom," the manufacturing decline, and (perhaps) a widespread perception among rural youth that rural areas were lacking in opportunities.

From 1986 to 1989, college graduates in nonmetro areas declined by two percent per year. Those with some college dropped 0.9 percent; high school graduates dropped 0.3 percent; and high school dropouts *gained* 0.2 percent, according to Ruy Teixeira in 1991. Certainly one of the major reasons was that earnings for highly educated workers in rural areas fell during the 1980s while in urban settings highly educated workers were increasing their earnings.

One of the most important factors in the exodus was that the best educated people were leaving rural areas.

Even while losing "the best and the brightest" during the 1980s, rural areas were holding their own in two important groups of migrants: retirees and ex-urban--suburbs that are very far from the cities and outside the metropolitan area--workers. The first group, retirees, was clustering in Florida, upper Great Lakes, southwestern and western nonmetro counties, although almost every state has some retirement counties. This is important because retirees do generate the need for jobs in services, construction and health care sectors for younger citizens of those counties, keeping more of them in place. Also, retirees often buy heavily from catalogues, and find purchases as well as income (Social Security and pension checks, dividends and savings) in their mailbox. These rural counties are often called "mailbox economies." The second group is the

exurban workers mentioned earlier, who wish to live close to a major urban center but not in it. According to William Frey of the Population Studio Center in Michigan, they bring high income and educational levels to a (small) number of rural counties. But it seems clear that these two groups, generating a "holding action" will not be enough to stem the exodus of people and jobs out of rural areas during the next decade.

Rural Jobs and Wages

Overall, the 1980s were not kind to rural workers as job growth stagnated, unemployment rates stayed high, and earnings declined. The income gap between urban and rural workers had narrowed in previous decades, but during the 1980s, the disparity increased. A key factor was manufacturing. After gaining 26 percent in jobs during the 1960s and 21 percent in the 1970s, manufacturing reached 23 percent of nonmetro jobs by 1980 - **twice** the number of jobs in agriculture and mining combined, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (1991). But during the 1980s, there was virtually zero gain in rural manufacturing. If you were to combine that with job losses in farming and mining during the 1980s, you would have a sense of the net loss of good jobs in rural areas.

Only in the routine, low-skill aspects of manufacturing did rural areas hold on, as plant closings happened first in the metro areas with their higher wages and building costs. What new plants there were often got built in rural areas where wages were lower, unions weaker, and land costs for the new plant were cheaper. However, even if the plant was built in a rural area, profits were usually sent to company headquarters downtown. (There are also many small machine shops and sub-assembly units in rural areas, but the data on number, location, workers and product are very poor.) Jobs, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), for the highly educated went to the urban areas, jobs for the less educated were increasingly rural (lower wage rates).

Evidence for the "new economy" in which **all** workers will have to demonstrate vastly increased levels of skill and knowledge is quite thin. The service sector is usually divided into two parts, one being highly paid professionals (lawyers, doctors, engineers); the other being low-skill jobs (clerks/cashiers, janitors, room cleaners and security guards). Both sectors will grow, but in rural areas, the latter is likely to grow the most. (Tourism is a growth industry in rural areas, consisting mainly of clerks/cashiers, waiters/waitresses, maids and janitors.) In every region, the rural job "mix" showed an increase in the percentage of low wage jobs from between 1979 and 1987 says Lucy Gorham in her 1991 report on nonmetropolitan development.

It does appear that high-skill, high-paying jobs are being created in metro areas, especially suburbs, while low-skill, low-pay service jobs are created in rural areas. These two "workforces," one fed by college graduates, the other by high school dropouts, suggest a drop

in the economic "middle" of America, with an increase in rich and poor citizens. But, there are exceptions. The rural retirement county will continue to need construction workers to build and maintain the housing, as will the skiing and other resort counties; some computer software and programming firms will migrate to rural areas as well, but these seem small ventures for the quarter of the U.S. workforce in rural locations.

In addition, about 10 percent of rural workers moonlight on a second, part-time job, according to the Southern Rural Development Center. These moonlighters were well-educated: eighty-seven percent had finished high school; and many were college graduates. Family income was low, around $25,000, while about 10 percent had incomes over $50,000. Few lived in poverty, but without the part-time job, many more would have. (Low-paying service jobs are often part-time so that expensive benefits like health care will not have to be paid by the employer.) If the notion of the "working poor" applies anywhere in America, it applies to rural areas. Here are well-educated people taking a part-time job (usually on top of a full-time "regular" job) to make ends meet, yet barely able to stay out of poverty.

While unemployment rates are high in rural areas, underemployment (low skill jobs, few promotions, low wages, part-time employment) may be the most important problem for the rural work force, creating a poverty rate of 18 percent in 1988 compared to 12 percent in metro areas (cities and suburbs combined), according to Daniel Lichter of Pennsylvania State University. Most rural households contain hardworking people, but a very high percentage are living in poverty because of the low wage rates in rural areas. The American "deal," from Benjamin Franklin could be posed here: *If you work hard, you should not be poor.*

Diversified economies tend to survive better in a recession than single industry economies, as Detroit, Flint, Youngstown and Houston can tell us. Low population densities in rural areas virtually guarantee poorly diversified economies, especially in services where rural jobs stress the low end jobs of tourism. It would appear that high rates of rural poverty, based on low wages, will be a major factor for years to come in rural development strategies. Rural poverty patterns may be different for every state. For example, O'Hare (1988) reports that one anthropologist in New York found three distinct patterns of rural poverty in her state:

1.) **Pockets of long-term, intergenerational poverty in the open countryside.**
These families are typically married, have one earner with very low skills. They live in substandard housing, either as owners or, increasingly, renters. They are socially very isolated.

2.) **Poverty in small villages and towns.**
In these areas, clusters of poor people live in apartments and are

increasing as people move in from rural areas.

3.) **Rapidly growing trailer parks and informal trailer clusters.**
While not all mobile homes are inhabited by the poor, trailers are rapidly becoming the response to a shortage of inexpensive rural housing. Another cheap housing source is the winterized cabins, which were once rented to vacationers which are now deteriorated and not suitable for vacation rentals.

Table 1
Population of the United States by Residence, 1990
(000s)

	Total	Urban	Total Rural*	Farm	Non-Farm
U.S. total	246,081	179,117	66,964	4,591	62,373
Metro residences	191,023	160,174	30,849	1,213	29,636
Nonmetro residence	55,057	18,943	36,115	3,378	32,737

*Rural includes both farm and nonfarm.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Residents of Farms and Rural Areas: 1990.*

Other states and regions will have different patterns, but this pattern may set the stage in terms of what to look for.

Geographic Profile Of Rural America: Who Lives Where?

In 1990, 66,964,000 Americans lived in rural areas, about one quarter of the U.S. total population of 246 million. In 1900, using a slightly different rural definition, 60 percent of Americans lived in rural areas. Only 4.5 million rural residents (1.9 percent of the U.S. population and seven percent of the rural residents) lived on farms in 1990, while 62 million rural residents did not. A further complication is that 30 million rural residents (46 percent) actually lived in metro areas in 1990, while 36 million rural residents (53 percent) lived in nonmetro areas! (See Table 1 above.)

In fact, 1.2 million **farm** residents lived in metro areas according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census. One major reason for this is the expansion of metro areas to include many low density "rural" counties as suburbs during the 1980s. The "exurbanites" who lived long distances from cities (and outside the metropolitan suburban areas) and only commuted in one or two days a week often bought farms, requiring the conversion of many barns to artists' studios and offices for legal, financial and scientific workers. There are also some striking differences in farm residents by region (see Table 2, next page). Farm residents are very underrepresented in the Northeast and heavily overrepresented in the Midwest.

We can also get a look at the ethnic background of farm and urban residents (see Table 3, next page). Whites

makeup 84 percent of the U.S. popula- tion, but are 97.5 percent of the farm population. All nonwhite groups are heavily under-represented among farm residents. It should also be clear from all of the tables that farm residents are a tiny fraction of the nonmetro/rural popu-lations in the U.S., and only 1.9 percent of the total U.S. population. Non-metro populations were about a quarter of the U.S. total in 1990.

Table 2
Number of Rural Residents by Region, 1990
(000s)

	Total	Farm	Nonfarm
Total, U.S.	246,081	4,591	241,490
Northeast	50,237	230	50,097
Percent of total	20.5	5.0	20.7
Midwest	59,816	2,320	57,496
Percent of total	24.3	50.5	23.8
South	83,990	1,350	82,640
Percent of total	34.1	29.4	34.2
West	51,947	691	51,256
Percent of total	21.1	15.1	21.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Residents of Farms and Rural Areas, 1990.*

Hopefully, the reader has now concluded that "rural" does not mean homogeneous farmers who are mostly living in families like "The Waltons." In this next section, we examine some

Table 3
Race and Hispanic Origin of U.S. Urban, Rural, Rural Farm and Rural Nonfarm Residents, 1990
(000s)

	Total	Urban	Rural		
			Total	Farm	Nonfarm
Total persons	246,081	179,117	66,964	4,591	62,373
White	206,837	141,118	61,719	4,478	57,240
African American	30,369	26,277	4,091	69	4,022
Other	8,875	7,722	1,154	44	1,111
Hispanic*	20,916	19,070	1,846	126	1,720

*Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Residents of Farms and Rural Areas: 1990.*

major issues in rural demographics to see if we can find some common threads in the diversity of rural life.

The Diversity of Rural Life

Rural Wealth

It is worth beginning this discussion of the diversity within rural areas to comment that, in 15 states, the wealthiest county according to 1990 census data was a nonmetropolitan one (see Table 4). Some of this "high income" is a statistical trick. For example, Loving, Texas, with the nation's second highest per capita income, is also the nation's least populated county with only 107 residents! Loving's only town, Mentone, has a total population of 20. A few ranchers with huge oil and cattle holdings easily kick up the per capita income figures. Incomes are also skewed in Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Oklahoma and Oregon by a few wealthy farmers and ranchers. Wheeling is Nebraska's wealthiest county, with only 948 residents, while Clark County, Idaho, has 762 inhabitants. Los Alamos in New Mexico has 18,115 residents, but the income is from the enormous weapons laboratory of the Department of Energy. In Teton (WY), Pitkin (CO), Nantucket (MA)and Summit (UT), the wealth comes from beach and ski resorts. If you divide the exorbitant income of a few, into a very small total number of people, you are bound to emerge with a misleading level of per capita income.

Table 4
States in Which The Wealthiest County is Rural, 1987-89
(per capita income for states by each state's highest county)

State	County	Per Capita Income($)
AK	Haines	37,548
TX	Loving	37,122
CO	Pitkin	33,108
NE	Wheeler	32,706
MA	Nantucket	26,652
OR	Sherman	24,474
NM	Los Alamos	23,826
ID	Clark	23,775
KS	Greeley	23,620
WY	Teton	23,337
OK	Alfalfa	20,274
UT	Summit	19,476
SD	Sully	19,210
MT	Treasure	17,645
ND	Walsh	16,912
U.S. Average		16,509

Source: *American Demographics*, July 1992.

Clearly, this account of rural wealth is a misreading of the lives and economic situation of the overwhelming majority of rural residents. But there are four categories of wealthy people in rural areas, according to O'Malley writing in *American Demographics*. These categories are:

1.) exurban workers who commute long distances to a core city;
2.) metro dwellers who sell their homes at a huge profit, move to a small town and live off the profit;
3.) seasonal "snowbirds" who spend time in scenic rural mountains and coasts; and,
4.) a small number of farmers and others who make money from the land and minerals underneath it.

Rural Poverty

Although the numbers will vary somewhat based on the ambiguities in definition we have already discussed, most analysts would agree with Dudenhefer (1993) that in 1990 there were nine million poor persons of a total rural population of 56 million, while 24.5 million poor persons lived in urban areas. The rural poverty rate (16 percent) was twice the suburban rate (eight percent) and almost as high as the inner city rate (19 percent). Rural poverty has a different face than that of urban poverty and it is harder to escape. According to Kathryn Porter, the following are characteristic of persons who are in persistent rural poverty:

- Forty-three percent of poor rural blacks stayed in poverty for more than ten years compared to only 30 percent of poor urban blacks.

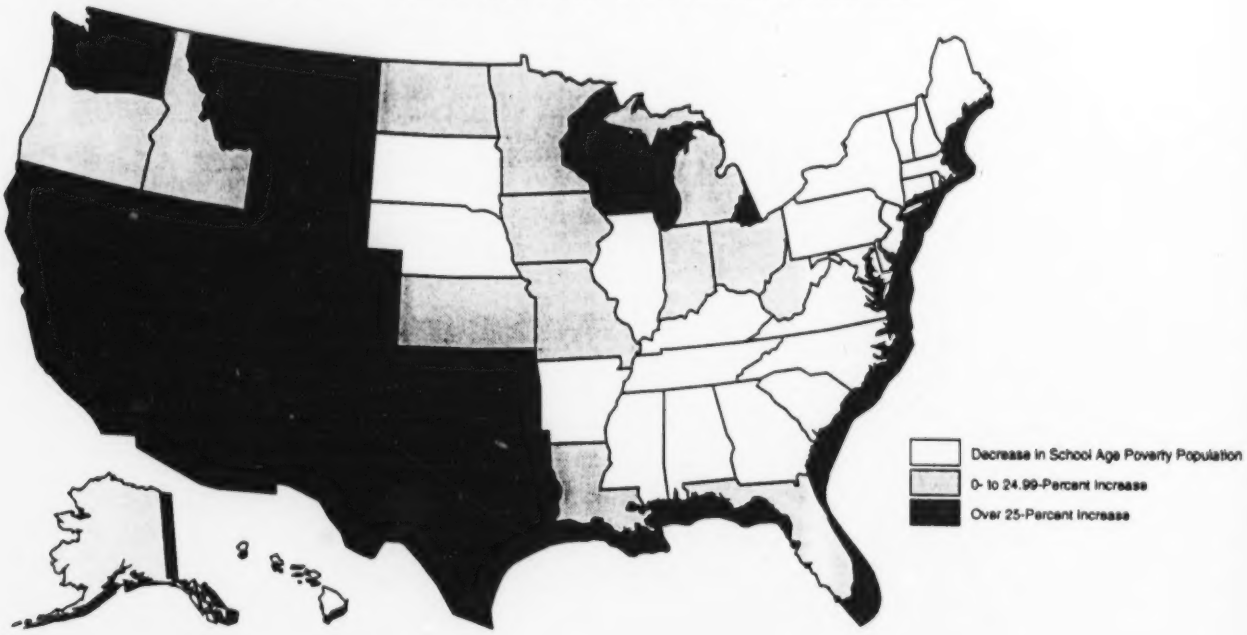
- Rural poverty is widely dispersed over a broad geographic area, making social service delivery expensive, as more time is taken between stops in low density areas.

- Fifty-two percent of the inner city poor lived in areas with more than 20 percent poverty; only 40 percent of the rural poor lives in such high density poverty.

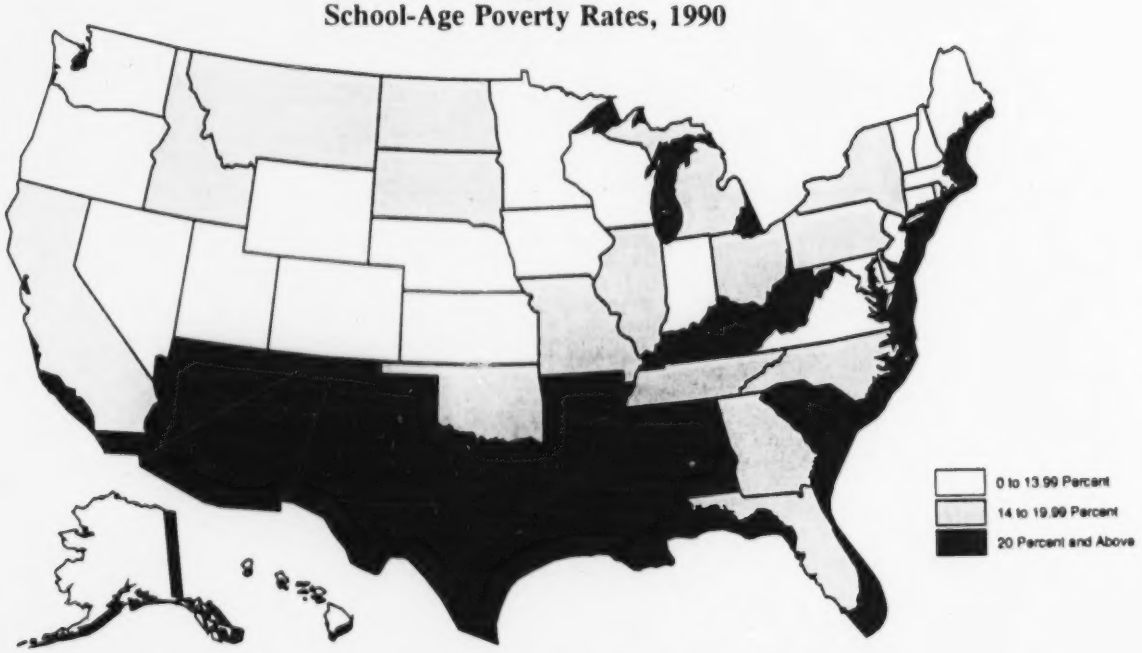
By region, the South has the highest poverty rate (22 percent) compared to 18 percent in the West, 14 percent in the Midwest and 11 percent in the Northeast. About 53 percent of the rural poor live in the South, 25 percent in the Midwest, 14 percent in the Northeast and eight percent in the West. Poverty rates for rural blacks (44 percent) are higher than the rates for inner-city blacks (33 percent), according to Kathryn Porter. The rural South has the largest population (97 percent) of African Americans living in poverty.

A 1993 report by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), *School-Age Demographics,* found that between 1980 and 1990, the number of poor school-age children grew and became more concentrated in the West and Southwest, while the South and East regions accounted for proportionately fewer of the nation's poor children. However, of the ten states with the highest rates of youth poverty, eight were in the South. Although these data are for the total state, the trends are interesting in that the South is doing better in terms of poor youth while the West is "losing ground." There is no reason to assume that rural poverty has been affected differently than metros during this decade, and thus the two maps (next page) show where increases of poor children are occurring (see Map A, next page) and where the

Map A:
Percent Change in the School-Age Poverty Population, 1980-1990



Map B
School-Age Poverty Rates, 1990



Source: United States General Accounting Office, *School Age Demographics*, 1993.

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highest percentage of poor youth could be found in 1990 (see Map B, on previous page).

In addition, many feel that the poverty profile of rural residents (often referred to as the "deserving poor") defies most of the stereotypes of poor people in America. ERIC Digest and Paul Dudenhefer found:

- A high percentage (62 percent) of the rural poor work, at least part-time. (However, wage levels are so low they remain in poverty).
- Rather than the single-parent household typical of urban poverty, 62 percent of poor rural households are two-parent families. Also, it is normal for both parents to work in rural settings. (Oddly, rural families that depend **entirely** on earned income are poorer than those receiving public assistance.)
- Rural residents were more likely to be white.
- Rural residents were less reliant on federal welfare programs.
- The rural poor were more likely to be over 65 years of age.

THE RURAL FAMILY

Less Like The Waltons

The major stereotype about rural areas is that they are great places to raise children, in that there is peace and quiet as well as a traditional pattern of childraising in families with both husbands and wives. Some elements of this pattern are still present, but the 1980s have seen rural households move closer to the metro/urban pattern. For example, by 1990, the share of female-headed younger families was 16 percent, approaching the urban rate of 19 percent. Among young rural black children, 58 percent were living with a single mother in 1990, higher than the urban rate of 52 percent. There have also been large increases in the number of rural people living alone, as well as those living with unrelated persons, according to *Rural Conditions and Trends, 1991*. Poverty rates for these "new" households are striking. In 1990, 17.5 percent of those living alone in rural areas were in poverty, 32.2 percent of those living with a single mother were poor, but only 5.6 percent of those in married-couple households were poor.

Females in rural areas in the past had more children than their urban counterparts. However, fertility rates dropped sharply in rural areas during the 1980s, and were actually below the rates in urban areas by 1990. In addition, 500 rural counties were experiencing more deaths than births in 1988, an astonishing development. In many rural areas, the funeral is replacing the baby shower as the major rite of passage, according to researcher Tom Heaton.

In many ways, social services need to be tailored to the rural clientele as support for child care facilities may not be effective in low density settings.

Rural children have less access to conventional child care facilities because there aren't enough children per square mile to justify the facility! High density urban day care centers may not be the right design for rural areas, any more than care for dependent elderly can use an urban model in a low density rural setting.

In addition, the assumptions about farm households and traditional values seem to be less accurate. On questions dealing with issues such as mothers working outside the home, divorce, day care, extra-marital sex, independence of sons and daughters and shared housework in dual earner households, Tim Heaton determined there are few differences to the answers given by rural residents and residents living in metro areas. One of the major differences, however, is that more rural residents disapprove of having a child outside of marriage and staying single throughout one's life. By and large, the changes in rural family structure, particularly the increase in female-headed households, makes it likely that poverty rates among rural youth will continue to increase in the next decade. (Single mothers are likely to have less education, lower income and higher unemployment.) White children, African American children, children in married-couple families and children in mother-only families are **all** more likely to be in poverty if they live in a rural area, according to Carolyn Rogers.

In many rural areas, the funeral is replacing the baby shower as the major rite of passage.

Rural Youth

Who they are?

While rural youth tend to parallel the more general descriptions of rural residents we have pursued so far, there are also some distinctions. The percentage of all U.S. births occurring in rural areas has steadily decreased, from 45 percent in 1950 to 19 percent in 1991, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

The rural youth population in 1991 was 15 million, of whom 85 percent were white, 12 percent black, and about four percent Hispanic. (Data on Asian and Native American children are old and not very reliable, but a majority of Native American children live in rural areas, while a very small number of Asian youth do.) Regionally, seventy four percent of rural children live in the South or Midwest, while only 53 percent of metro (city and suburban) children do (see Table 5, next page).

In terms of race and ethnicity, one in four rural kids are African American, and 94 percent lived in the rural South in 1991, according to researchers Kathryn Porter and Arloc Sherman. Hispanic kids are about even in the rural South and West, 48 and 46 percent, respectively in each. Rural white children are spread more equally by

Table 5
Children by Region, March 1991

	Nonmetro		Metro	
	Number (millions)	Percent	Number (millions)	Percent
All Regions	14.9	100.0	50.2	100.0
Northeast	1.4	9.0	11.1	22.0
Midwest	4.6	31.0	11.2	22.0
South	6.5	43.0	15.7	31.0
West	2.4	16.0	12.1	24.0

Source: Arloc Sherman, *Falling By the Wayside*, 1992.

Table 6
Children in Nonmetro Areas by Region, Race and Ethnicity, 1991

All Regions	White	Black	Hispanic*
Number (millions)	12.7	1.8	0.6
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Northeast	11.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Midwest	35.0%	3.0%	4.0%
South	37.0%	94.0%	48.0%
West	17.0%	1.0%	46.0%

*Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
Source: Arloc Sherman, 1992.

geographic area (see Table 6, above).

During the 1980s, the number of children living on farms dropped by a quarter, from 1.6 million to 1.2 million. Despite the image of the large farm family, farm kids are two percent of all U.S. children, the same percentage as all farm residents are of the U.S. total - two percent in 1993. (However, the farm census has been discontinued.) African American kids living on farms dropped even more, from 81,000 to just 26,000 between 1980 and 1988, down by two thirds. Rural youth populations dropped proportionately with farm children, down 28 percent between 1980 and 1990.

Poverty Among Rural Youth

Rural children, like all U.S. children, are more likely to be poor than are rural adults. Unfortunately, the youngest kids are the most likely to be poor regardless of residence.

In addition, there is a pervasive pattern of racial and ethnic difference in youth poverty rate across ethnic categories. In 1990, the poverty rate for black children in rural areas was 52.5 percent, followed by Hispanics with 40.7 percent, then whites with just 18.4 percent. These poverty rates were higher than the poverty rates for children in metro areas.

If we examine poverty by region in addition to race and ethnicity as Sherman

did in his analysis for the Children's Defense Fund , it is clear that the South is the poorest region for youth. Although there are more poor white children (934,000) in the South than black (894,000), the poverty rate in 1990 for Southern black children was more than double the rate for Southern white children, 54 percent for blacks compared to 19.9 percent for white kids. The poverty rate for Hispanic children in the South was also more than twice the rate for white children.

The Rural "Hyper-Poor"

While poverty numbers provide a useful threshold for analysis, we need also to consider the poorest of the poor (those living in extreme poverty conditions -- at half the poverty level -- or the "hyper-poor"). There is a body of research on the rural underclass compared to the urban underclass, but much of that data excludes youth populations from the analysis, and is therefore not used here. (See O'Hare, 1988 and 1992.) Hyper-poor rural youth and their families are at a particularly dangerous point. They are:

- very likely to stay poor for extended periods of time, given the lack of opportunities for getting out of poverty;
- more likely to suffer from malnutrition, even in a farming area;
- much more likely to be in families that break up at this poverty level or to be in families which are more likely to suffer depression, alcoholism child abuse and other addictions.

These children are in some of the most dangerous settings in the nation in terms of their well-being. About a third (500,000 of 1.8 million) of all rural black children are hyper-poor. More than half of poor black rural children are hyper-poor. The percent of kids in hyper-poverty is more than twice as high in female-headed families in rural as well as other settings. But, the very young hyper-poor kids are the most at risk as illustrated in Table 8.

Note that very young rural kids (under age 6) raised by a single mother are just as likely to be hyper-poor as inner city kids raised by a single mother. Yet, within the city limits, there are generally far more resources that are easily accessible to help youngsters get out of poverty. It's a frighteningly high

Table 8
Extreme Poverty Among Children
1990
(percent of all children below half of poverty level)

Areas	Total Children	In Female Headed Family	Younger than 6 in Female-Headed Family
Rural	9.3	29.7	40.2
Metro	8.7	27.2	36.3
City	13.8	31.9	40.0

Source: Arloc Sherman, 1992.

40 percent of rural **and** urban young kids who are living at half the poverty level and being raised by a single mother.

In addition, cash aid to poor families with kids, provided by AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), is received by less than half of all rural poor children. Two-thirds of poor city kids receive funds from AFDC. The reason is clear: **two-parent families working more than 100 hours a month are ineligible for AFDC, no matter how poor they are!** The "working poor," overly represented among rural households, are defined out of the benefit package, while an inner city child in a family in which no one works is much more likely to received this crucial assistance. In 1990, the average annual income for a rural family on AFDC was $2,598, while the average annual income for an urban family was $3,773.

The Special Case of Hyper-Poor Migrant Children

A special kind of hyper-poverty for children exists with children of migrant workers in America. These children and their families migrate through agricultural states looking for work. Like the homeless, an accurate count of migrant children is not yet possible. (A minimum of 780,000 have been counted by the interstate Migrant Student Record Transfer System in Denver, however.) Four of five of these children are Hispanic. It is safe to say that these 780,000 children live in rural areas and are overwhelmingly poor. Several special circumstances make their lives especially difficult including changes of location; great pressure to work instead of study; unhealthy living conditions with no place for study; as well as being surrounded by others who share pervasive poverty, and few models for successful escape from poverty. According to Sherman, who has written extensively on this subject:

- As early as kindergarten, 35 percent of migrant children are over-age for grade level compared to five percent of all students. Students who are held back a year have an increased chance of dropping out of high school.
- A typical migrant student will change schools six to eight times each year.
- Almost 10 percent of school-age migrant students (age 5-17) were not in **any** school during the 1988-89 school year.
- A minimum of 200,000 migrant students have limited English proficiency.
- Half of the migrant seventh-graders fail to finish high school on time.

While migrant students have suffered, the federal Migrant Education Program has made a real difference by working with individual families. For example, the program has created computerized student record transfers that allow one teacher to "hand off" a student to another teacher in a different part of the nation with a maximum of information that follows the student; the provision of portable study "packages" to get up to speed quickly in the new

school, etc. As a result, high school completion rates of migrant youths increased from 10 percent in 1974 to 49 percent in 1986. The sad news is that, even though the number of identified migrant children continues to increase, funding for this highly successful program has declined in every year since 1982.

Health Issues

There are many pervasive issues of health care delivery in rural areas. One of the most pervasive is the lack of access to emergency services. Obviously, low density areas will be further away from emergency services, which are located where they can serve the maximum number of people. Preventive services and health information tend to be located in high density areas as well. It is important to understand the way in which problems reinforce each other in rural areas. For example:

- Of the 2,500 rural hospitals in America, 600 are at or near bankruptcy.
- In Alabama, one-third of the counties do not have hospitals that can safely deliver a baby.
- Rural hospitals get about 25 percent less than urban ones from Medicare for the same procedures.
- AIDS is fast becoming a rural problem, according to the United Way. The situation is critical because of a lack of appropriate resources and social isolation in rural areas: "We'd rather not talk about it."

Teen Pregnancy

Teens in rural areas give birth more often than teens in metro areas, but they are more often married teen mothers. However, the trends are beginning to change. In 1988, 23 percent of all rural births were to unmarried women compared with 26 percent of all metro births. Rural women were less likely to receive medical care during the first trimester of pregnancy than their metro counterparts.

In addition, because so many physicians in rural areas are in family practice, and so few in obstetrics, a complicated birth may be tended to by a family doctor without specialized training, according to Sherman (1992).

Drugs

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has reported that drug usage in rural areas is becoming a major issue among all age groups. Among youth, there are very few differences in consumption of drugs between young people in rural and metro areas. The Department also mentions the lack of personnel with specific training in drug prevention and counseling, the lack of rural acceptance of such programs, the much higher unit cost for treatment, the miles that must be travelled by both staff and client, and the lack of support services in many rural areas for community members involved with drugs.

Aids

AIDS is becoming a major disease in rural America, where most treatment is provided by a family physician with only one or two AIDS patients. Many rural AIDS patients try holding a garage sale to raise money for AZT and other expensive drugs. Increasingly, AIDS in rural areas is affecting women, heterosexuals and blacks. The "victims are convenience store clerks, chicken farmers, school teachers and welfare mothers," writes the *Washington Post*, (June 13, 1993).

Other Health Issues

Other health problems in rural areas include accidental death, 40 percent higher than in metro areas. Many chronic diseases, including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, along with vision and hearing problems are especially prevalent in rural areas. In addition, according to the Office of Technology Assessment, rural residents are much less likely to use seat belts regularly, less likely to exercise, and more likely to be overweight.

In terms of more typical health services, less than 60 percent of all rural children age two and older saw a dentist at all in 1986, and similar numbers are true for physicians. There is a serious shortage of professional health workers in rural areas, a condition that is unlikely to improve. Rural citizens represent a quarter of the U.S. population, but half live in an area where there is a shortage of health service workers. Nearly three-fourths of a million rural residents live in a county which contains no primary care physician. There were 91 doctors per 100,000 people in rural areas and 216 doctors per 100,000 in urban areas. In addition, rural residents are less likely to receive employer-based health insurance. In 1990, only 27 percent of rural residents received any employer-provided health insurance. Among children, one in six in rural areas was completely uninsured, compared to one in eight in suburbs and one in seven in cities, according to Sherman.

One in six rural children was completely uninsured, compared to one in eight in suburbs and one in seven in cities.

Rural Education

Educational Issues

As the reader will see, many of the stereotypes of rural life are equally useless when applied to rural schools. Even with the idyllic Norman Rockwell image of "one room schoolhouse," rural schools are often too small to offer comprehensive instruction from teachers who are qualified in specialized subjects. Neither teachers nor administrators are paid well and benefits are often missing. Many of these teachers may also be a long way from a college or university where they could increase their subject matter skills. Students are often not able to attend the best colleges and universities because of

a lack of specialized courses in their high schools. And the tax base in many rural counties is not sufficient to provide even adequate, much less excellent, schools.

Rural Schools

In 1990, the U.S. had 22,412 rural schools (28.3 percent of all U.S. schools) which enrolled 6.6. million students, or 16.3 percent of all students. One-quarter of these "rural" schools are located in counties defined as "metropolitan," and enroll two-fifths of all rural students.

Rural schools have small enrollments. For example, 74 percent of rural secondary schools have fewer than 400 students, and enroll 41 percent of all rural secondary students. Only 20 percent of urban secondary schools are that small, and they enroll only five percent of urban secondary students.

There are three schools in a typical rural district compared to about eight in an urban one. About half of all urban secondary students attend a school with over 1,200 students; only 10 percent of rural secondary students are in such a big school. However, 20 percent of rural schools have small enrollments of fewer than 100 students. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, no rural schools in Rhode Island and Delaware have under 100 students while in Montana 65 percent of rural schools have under 100 students. The 3,000 smallest school districts enroll fewer than 300 students in their entire district.

Teachers

Obviously, it is difficult to hire excellent teachers in small rural districts with little taxing power for teacher salaries. Without a sizable faculty, it is difficult to offer a diverse college preparatory curriculum as well as quality vocational preparation. Yet, about 560,000 (24 percent) of America's two million teachers are in rural areas. They are younger than their urban counterparts, have less experience, and possess a Master's Degree much less often (34 percent for rural teachers and 46 percent for urban teachers). About one-fourth of the rural secondary school teachers of science and special education lacked a major or other certification in their field, compared to 18 percent of teachers in metro areas in these fields. Not only do rural teachers receive smaller salaries (almost $5,000 less than the salaries of teachers in metro areas in 1988), but increases that come with years of experience and higher degrees are also smaller in rural schools. (Even after adjusting for cost of living differences, the earnings of rural teachers are still considerably behind.)

In addition to salary, benefits such as medical and dental insurance and pension plans are less frequent in rural school districts. While the benefits of smaller classes and teaching in a more cohesive community are great for rural teachers, these teachers are also responsible for more subjects, requiring more preparations per day. **Neither** rural nor urban teachers are delighted with their working conditions.

The U.S. Department of Education (1992) found that in terms of age, pay and benefits, rural principals look very much like their teachers that they employ. Being younger, they tend to leave their jobs more often, but whether they are lost to education, or whether they migrate to larger urban districts with more opportunities is not certain.

The "proof of the pudding" is of course in educational attainment. A 1990 study using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is of great value, (even though limited to 12th graders). Historically, rural students have done less well, and gone to college less often than their metro counterparts. Generally, in terms of reading and writing skills, there are no differences when comparing students in metro and nonmetro areas. Only in the South do differences appear which favor metro students, but these differences are small. In fact, rural students in the Northeast and Midwest do a little better in most subjects than their metro counterparts, and rural students in the Midwest do considerably better in science than metro students. Although very small schools (under 300 students) are a concern, there seems to be no systematic achievement differences that are associated with school size, as there are for **class** size.

However, there are still some major deficits in rural education. Only 48 percent of secondary students in rural areas attend a school that offers calculus, compared to 90 percent of students in metro areas. And, only seven percent of rural students can take second year physics compared to 30 percent of metro students. These advanced courses, while not showing up on NAEP, may prevent college attendance, but more likely can act to limit the range of colleges to which the rural student can apply. In general, while rural schools are doing a parallel (and much improved) job of educating their students compared with metro areas, graduate's ability to attend the most selective colleges and universities is still limited due to the lack of specialized courses being offered in rural schools.

Even though rural students currently are doing about as well as their metro counterparts on most measures, there are still deficiencies in the rural adult populations. In 1990, 31 percent of rural adults over age 25 had not completed high school compared with 23 percent of the adults in metro areas. And, only 13 percent of rural adults had earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 23 percent of metro residents.

Through time, however, the increased educational attainment of today's rural youth will even out the differences in adult high school graduates. A significant gap will remain, however, in terms of college graduates in the rural population, exacerbated by the movement of college graduates out of rural areas, according to Teixeira writing for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In addition, metro counties were three times more likely than rural counties to contain a public college, making accessibility to college a continuing problem in rural areas.

Conclusions

This report has attempted to summarize a great deal of information across a wide range topics. Under all the analysis is one major generalization: **poverty and disadvantage among rural youth is truly an invisible issue in the United States**. Given that more than half of all Americans now live in our 40 largest metropolitan areas, it seems clear that the media go where the people are, and political responses are amazingly related to media sound bites. It is not clear what would galvanize Americans into realizing that for every American child who is seriously at risk in an inner city, there is one rural child, equally at risk. In fact, if the two children get very sick, the odds favor the metro child, as emergency services will almost always be further away for the rural one.

Behind the issue of rural youth poverty is the rural economy. Even if rural youth drastically increased their occupational knowledge and skills, there is no reason to think that more jobs would be created in rural areas that would require these skills. No one seems to have a clue as to how we could **deliberately** create more new jobs that have high skill and knowledge levels, that pay well and that have promotion potential. Yet the problem doesn't seem to be impossible, unless one believes that the economy truly functions by an "invisible hand" and that we must all keep hands off the levers or we will ruin everything. All across America, business incubators are giving newly "hatched" small businesses the management and financial training they need to stay in business. What if the only small businesses accepted for incubators were those that could demonstrate that a majority of the jobs in their business would be middle-income jobs with promotional potential, and would be located in rural areas?

There are undoubtedly many other ways in which we could restore the "middle" to the American job structure. It is vital that we begin to think seriously about this issue at all levels of government, as we are currently generating far more college graduates each year than we are creating jobs that demand the skills of a college graduate! Creating more low-pay, low-skill jobs in rural areas does not solve the long-term issues of the quality of rural life.

This leads to another much neglected issue of social policy. For the most part, Americans who have wanted to become successful have had to leave inner cities and rural areas in order to live (and work) in the suburbs, where the best new jobs have been created. As a result, much talent, energy, creativity and skill has been sucked out of **both** city and rural areas, ending up in the suburbs. Chicago is a case in point. Eighty percent of the income generated in the city of Chicago is spent in its suburbs. There really are only two choices for social policy:

1.) Continue our present strategy of rewarding people who move to the suburbs and punishing those who do not.

2.) Develop a policy that allows people to move ahead in terms of wealth or achievement regardless of where they live. (They should be able to "bloom where they're planted.") Most rural and inner city youth understand that they are located in the wrong place, but many would like to work hard and become a success **where they are.**

Is the nation really better off if highly prosperous suburbs continue to act in splendid isolation from the inner cities and rural areas that made them possible in the first place? The only way to think about a metropolitan area is to make sure that opportunities for success are distributed throughout the core city, the suburbs and outlying rural areas, much as Greek city-states were in pre-Christian times.

About half of the counties in the U.S. lost population between 1980 and 1990, almost all were rural counties. One more decade of such declines, and many rural counties may not be viable. How, for example, can Iowa (90 percent of Iowa counties declined in population between 1980 and 1990) lure doctors and other health practitioners to come and set up shop in Iowa's rural areas? Iowa is now the third oldest population in the nation, mostly because young people are leaving the state. Who provides special services for Iowa's elderly? How do new teachers get attracted to rural school districts in Iowa when they can make more in Des Moines? Without education and health care services, there comes a time when a dangerous percentage of residents may flee a rural county, taking their jobs, skills and tax base with them.

For some time, there has been a debate as to how we can "gentrify" our inner cities by encouraging suburban residents to move "back" to the cities again. These strategies have almost always failed, in part because of the inclusion of the word "back." A large percentage of suburbanites were **born** in the suburbs and have never lived in inner cities. Some are suggesting the same

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argument for rural areas: that we need to lure people "back" to rural areas to live. Both arguments seem born to fail, unless we can learn how to create more well-paying jobs with promotional potential in the areas that need them the most - inner cities and rural areas.

Rather than trying to lure people into a new area to live, it might be more useful to work to stop the outward migration of people from inner cities **and** rural areas to the suburbs. Some cases exist in which a new business, moving into a suburban location, will also set up a satellite operation in the core city/outlying rural area. These "incubators" can work in city, suburban and outlying rural areas to generate new small businesses in the metro area.

For many rural areas to remain viable, education, health care, fire and police services, transportation, churches

and local businesses will have to work together to maximize their ability to provide comprehensive services to rural citizens. This may mean sharing facilities, sharing skills, sharing transportation and sharing information. But without working together, the rural funding base will inevitably continue to decline. Rural leadership must do everything possible to **maintain** their present residents (especially college graduates), rather than to focus only on luring new residents to the area. Education is only one cog in this very complex machine. But in both rural and inner city areas, the efforts must be to:

- hold on to present residents by comprehensive services and new economic opportunities, particularly small business starts in incubators; and
- only after the first strategy has been implemented, make an effort to attract new residents.

About one-quarter of our children live in inner cities, another one-quarter live in rural areas. They are different in some ways, but have many things in common also. However, America cannot survive if all these non-suburban kids, **half of our nation's future**, fail to achieve their potential. Even suburbs cannot succeed for long, acting in splendid isolation from everyone else.

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The author uses census and other data to examine how families have changed over the last several decades. Included are data on types of families: step-families, two-earner, single-parent; living arrangements of children; and families in poverty. Many families are doing well, but some are struggling. Just because the family is different, does not mean that it is bad, or that it is dysfunctional. According to Outtz, "we must recognize the diversity of American families as well as the complexities surrounding the needs of this diverse group."
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